

Message Text

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70

ACTION NEA-10

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R 211155Z OCT 76

FM AMCONSUL TABRIZ

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 0183

INFO AMEMBASSY TEHRAN

AMCONSUL SHIRAZ

AMCONSUL ISFAHAN

C O N F I D E N T I A L TABRIZ 0050

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, PINS, IR

SUBJ: STUDENTS STRIKE UNIVERSITY OF AZERBADEGAN

SUMMARY: BEGINNING IN THE AGRICULTURAL FACULTY AND MARKED BY NUMEROUS SMALL, PEACEFUL DEMONSTRATIONS, A STUDENT STRIKE BECAME EFFECTIVE THROUGHOUT THE UNIVERSITY OF AZERBADEGAN ON OCTOBER 12, WITH NO STUDENTS ATTENDING CLASSES. THE STRIKE PROTESTS A DECISION REACHED AT THE NATIONAL EDUCATIONAL CONFERENCE LAST MONTH AT RAMSAR TO LIMIT GOVERNMENT SCHOLARSHIPS, ONCE PROVIDED TO ALL COLLEGE STUDENTS, TO THE TOP 35 PERCENT SCHOLASTICALLY. THE UNIVERSITY CHANCELLOR HOPES TO AVOID CLOSING THE UNIVERSITY, AS HAS REPORTEDLY BEEN DONE IN AHWAZ, BUT FEELS THIS IS THE ONLY CHOICE UNLESS THE CENTRAL GOVERNMENT BACKS DOWN. THE STRIKE HAS BEEN WELL ORGANIZED, PEACEFUL, AND EFFECTIVE. END SUMMARY

1. IN THE FIRST WEEK OF OCTOBER, IT WAS ANNOUNCED AT THE UNIVERSITY OF AZERBADEGAN IN TABRIZ THAT STUDENT SCHOLARSHIPS WOULD BE RESTRICTED TO THE TOP 35 PERCENT SCHOLASTICALLY OF REGISTERED STUDENTS, IN ACCORDANCE WITH A DECISION MADE AT THE RAMSAR CONFERENCE ON EDUCATION. PRIOR TO LAST YEAR, ALMOST ALL STUDENTS

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RECEIVED SCHOLARSHIPS, WITH AMOUNTS OF AWARDS BEING

DETERMINED LOCALLY BE A SCHOLARSHIP COMMITTEE. THIS CAUSED SOME DIFFICULTY, WITH CHARGES OF FAVORITISM AND COMPLAINTS OF LACK OF STANDARDS BEING COMMON, LAST YEAR IT WAS DETERMINED THAT SCHOLARSHIPS WOULD BE GIVEN ONLY

TO OUT-OF-TOWN STUDENTS, AND TO A FEW FROM TABRIZ WITH SPECIAL NEED. THIS REDUCED THE NUMBER RECEIVING MONEY TO ABOUT 65 PERCENT OF THE STUDENTS. THE SCHOLARSHIP WAS ALSO FIXED FOR ALL RECIPIENTS AT 5500 RIALS MONTHLY (ABOUT \$78). THE BASIS FOR SELECTION OF THE FEW TABRIZIS STILL OCCASIONED SOME COMPLAINTS OF FAVORITISM. REPORTEDLY (NO PUBLISHED REPORTS ARE AVAILABLE HERE) THE RAMSAR CONFERENCE DECIDED THAT HENCEFORTH, SCHOLARSHIPS OF 5500 RIALS WOULD BE PAID ONLY TO A MAXIMUM OF 35 PERCENT OF THE STUDENTS--THAT THOSE MAINTAINING A "B" AVERAGE WOULD BE ELIGIBLE IF WITHIN THE 35 PERCENT, AND THAT IN NO CASE WOULD A SCHOLARSHIP BE PAID TO STUDENTS WITH LESS THAN A "C" AVERAGE. ACCORDING TO DR. FIROUZ POUR-FARHAD, VICE-CHANCELLOR FOR STUDENT AFFAIRS, THE UNIVERSITY RECEIVED NO DETAILS IN ADVANCE OF AN ORDER FROM TEHRAN IN THE FIRST WEEK OF OCTOBER TO PUT THIS DECISION INTO EFFECT IMMEDIATELY.

2. THE STUDENT REACTION WAS IMMEDIATE AND ANGRY, BUT WELL DISCIPLINED. A DELEGATION REPRESENTING ALL CLASSES AND ALL FACULTIES CALLED ON THE CHANCELLOR, DR. FAGHIH, AND PRESENTED A REASONED PETITION SHOWING THAT FOR MANY OF THE STUDENTS IT WAS ECONOMICALLY IMPOSSIBLE FOR THEM TO CONTINUE AT SCHOOL WITHOUT SCHOLARSHIPS. DR. FAGHIH REPLIED HE HAD NO CHOICE. THE STUDENTS AT THE FACULTY OF AGRICULTURE BEGAN BOYCOTTING CLASSES. OTHER STUDENTS STAGED PEACEFUL DEMONSTRATIONS AT THE CHANCELLOR'S OFFICE, IN THE FACULTY HOUSING AREAS, AND AT A CAMPUS RALLY. A FEW EXTRA POLICE WERE CALLED IN, INCLUDING MILITARY POLICE PRESUMABLY BECAUSE THEY ARE MORE DISCIPLINED, AND A GUARD WAS PLACED ON THE CHANCELLOR'S HOUSE, BUT NO ARRESTS WERE MADE, AND THERE WAS NO VIOLENCE ON EITHER SIDE. STUDENT BOYCOTTS SPREAD, HOWEVER. ON OCTOBER 11, AT A SECOND RALLY, A UNIVERSITY-WIDE STRIKE WAS CALLED TO COMMENCE OCTOBER 12

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AND CONTINUE UNTIL THE DECISION WAS REPEALED. A SECOND DELEGATION CALLED ON THE CHANCELLOR, WHO PROMISED TO RELAY THEIR REQUEST TO TEHRAN IF THEY WOULD RETURN TO CLASSES. NONETHELESS, ON OCTOBER 12 THROUGH THE END OF THE WEEK APPARENTLY NO STUDENTS ATTENDED CLASS.

3. DR. FAGHIH STATES THAT HE HAS INDEED SENT THE STUDENTS' REQUEST TO TEHRAN. HE REPORTS THAT THE SAME

THING HAPPENED IN AHWAZ, AND THE CHANCELLOR THERE HAS CLOSED THE SCHOOL. HE HOPES TO AVOID THAT, BUT IF STUDENTS DO NOT RETURN STARTING SATURDAY, MANY WILL BE FAILED FOR THE TERM FOR EXCESSIVE ABSENCES, UNDER CURRENT UNIVERSITY REGULATIONS, AND BY THE END OF NEXT WEEK THIS WILL APPLY TO THE MAJORITY OF THE SCHOOL.

4. VARIOUS TEACHERS HAVE STATED THEIR SYMPATHY FOR THE STUDENTS' REQUEST, AND DR. FAGHIH AND DR. POUR-FARHAD HAVE BOTH EXPRESSED THEIR ADMIRATION FOR THE EFFECTIVE AND PEACEFUL ORGANIZATION. DR. POUR-FARHAD STATES THAT THERE APPEAR NOT TO BE JUST A FEW RINGLEADERS, BUT THAT THIS STRIKE APPARENTLY ENVOLED OUT OF THE WIDESPREAD STUDENT FEELING EXPRESSED AT THE RALLIES. HOWEVER, NOBODY, STUDENT, FACULTY, OR ADMINISTRATION, EXPECTS TEHRAN TO BACK DOWN, AND NO ALTERNATIVE IS SEEN TO CLOSING THE SCHOOL. THIS WILL MEAN ALL STUDENTS WILL GET ZEROS AS GRADES FOR ALL COURSES THIS TERM, WHICH WILL BE ON THEIR PERMANENT TRANSCRIPTS. THE BEST DR. FAGHIH HOPES FOR IS AN AGREEMENT FROM TEHRAN TO ALLOW THIS TERM TO BE REMOVED FROM TRANSCRIPTS IF THE STUDENTS DROP THEIR DEMANDS AND AGREE TO RETURN PEACEFULLY NEXT TERM. THE WORST COULD BE AN ESCALATING PROTEST ENDING IN VIOLENCE, AS HAPPENED THREE YEARS AGO WITH AT LEAST FIVE STUDENTS DEAD.

5. COMMENT: THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE STRIKE SHOWS A GROWTH IN POLITICAL AWARENESS AND ORGANIZATION AMONG THE STUDENTS, AND THE WAY THIS ISSUE IS RESOLVED MAY DETERMINE THE COURSE OF FUTURE STUDENT ACTIVISM. IF THE STUDENTS LOSE, THEY MAY REVERT TO PREVIOUS TACTICS OF VIOLENCE AND DESTRUCTION, ONLY TO BE PUT DOWN BY GREATER VIOLENCE. IF THEY WIN, THEY MAY BEGIN MAKING

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INCREASING DEMANDS ON THE SYSTEM, FEELING THEIR POWER. IF EITHER TREND SPREADS, THROUGHOUT THE NATIONAL UNIVERSITY SYSTEM, IT MAY HAVE EVEN BROADER POLITICAL IMPLICATIONS.

6. EMBASSY COMMENT: WE ARE ATTEMPTING TO ESTABLISH WHETHER CUT BACK IN ALLOWANCES IS A LOCAL PHENOMENON RESTRICTED TO TABRIZ AND MASHHAD, WHERE STUDENTS HAVE ALSO BEEN DEMONSTRATING, OR WHETHER IT IS IN FACT ACROSS-THE-BOARD NATIONAL POLICY. WILL ADVISE.
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